

Amendments to the Specification:

Please amend the specification as follows:

Page 1: After the title, insert:

--This is a 371 national phase application of PCT/JP2003/012850 filled 07 October 2003, claiming priority to Japanese Application No. 2002-295284 filed 08 October 2002, No. 2003-032621 filed 10 February 2003, and No. 2003-032622 filed 10 February 2003, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.--

Page 44-45: Replace the last paragraph starting on page 44, line 23, and ending on page 45, line 6, with the following amended paragraph:

In addition, an ion conducting membrane according to the present invention can be obtained by forming a sulfonated polyarylene ether-based compound of the present invention or a precursor of a sulfonated polyarylene ether-based compound of the present invention which has at least a non-sulfonated dioxybiphenylene structure which can provide a sulfonated polyarylene ether-based compound of the present invention by means of a sulfonation reaction, or a composition that contains such a precursor, into film form, and after that, by making a sulfonation reaction progress while maintaining the film form. Any of the above-described variety of sulfonation agents can be used as the sulfonation agent at this time. In addition to this, it is possible to sulfonate the precursor using a sulfonation agent in gas form or in mist form, as described in, for example, Japanese Laid-Open Patent Publication No. ~~63-292920~~ 63-291920, and Japanese Published Patent Publication No. 2002-543224.